

Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation Multimodal and Public Space Design Guidelines

Steering Committee Meeting #5
May 23, 2012, 10:00am – 2:00pm
Half Moone Cruise and Celebration Center
Norfolk, Virginia

After affirming the regional planning framework in the previous meeting, the Multimodal and Public Space Design Guidelines steering committee met in Norfolk to focus on multimodal activity centers and transit-oriented development. The study team presented the methodology for multimodal centers based on transect zones and density of jobs and population. A prototypical multimodal center has a gradient of density that is most intense within the primary walkshed (inner quarter mile radius) and lessens with distance from the core. The guidelines will provide diagrams, metrics, and descriptions to identify center types. Planners can use these guidelines to identify and prioritize investments to maximize the multimodal network.

After a presentation and discussion on how the guidelines will look at multimodal centers, Ray Amoruso gave a brief overview of the Tide light rail system and station areas. With the assistance of HRT representatives Ray Amoruso, Karen Waterman, and Lee Roy Padgett, the committee broke out into small groups to explore the station areas of Norfolk's Tide light rail system. Each group assessed the development within the station area walkshed. Participants noted the pedestrian, bicycle and transit activity, facilities, and connections.

JD Bondurant and Mike Hawkins from the Virginia Housing Development Authority shared information from the housing community, including results from an analysis on jobs, housing, and transportation, studies on housing needs of different generations, financial resources for communities looking to invest in infill redevelopment opportunities, and successful mixed-use developments that revitalized activity centers across the state. Amanda Lutke from the City of Norfolk shared insights from the light rail planning process, including the zoning amendments to encourage higher density development within the station areas and the community engagement process.

The major objectives of this meeting were to:

- Present and discuss the methodology for multimodal activity centers and transit-oriented development nodes
- Explore the Tide light rail system and assess the relevance of the guidelines to actual station areas
- Present and discuss connections between activity centers, housing, and transit oriented development.

Meeting Participants

1. Nick Alexandrow, Potomac & Rappahannock Transportation Commission
2. Ray Amoruso, Hampton Roads Transit
3. Gha-is Bashir, Petersburg Area Transit
4. John Bolecek, VDOT – Statewide Bicycle and Pedestrian Planner
5. JD Bondurant, Virginia Housing Development Authority
6. Scott Clark, GRTC Transit System
7. Cristina Finch, Roanoke Valley-Alleghany Regional Commission
8. Anthony Foster, DRPT
9. Robin Grier, VDOT Transportation & Mobility Planning Division / VASITE
10. Randy Hodgson, VDOT Northern Virginia
11. George Homewood, City of Norfolk
12. Nancy Lo, VA Department for the Aging

13. Amanda Lutke, City of Norfolk
14. Sandi McNinch, VA Economic Development Partnership
15. Clara Meier, Middle Peninsula Planning District Commission
16. Peter Ohlms, Virginia Center for Transportation Innovation and Research
17. Benito Pérez, Hampton Roads Transportation Planning Organization
18. Daniel Reese, FAMPO/ GW Regional Commission
19. Mark Schnauffer, City of Virginia Beach
20. Keith Sherrill, VA Dept. of Housing and Community Development
21. Eric Stringfield, VDOT Hampton Roads
22. Debbie Swetnam, Blacksburg Transit
23. Karen Waterman, Hampton Roads Transit

Summary of Key Issues and Opportunities

- The guidelines can help communities to focus resources to multimodal activity centers.
- Transit is not a necessary component to multimodal centers. Multimodal activity centers foster walking and biking to a variety of destinations regardless of whether transit service is provided. Multimodal activity centers are logical places for transit service. Investments within multimodal activity centers will foster ridership because of the density of activities.
- Need to demonstrate community benefits of concentrating activities within multimodal centers. Concepts concerning density are useful to explore in the Guidelines as they are a key issue among local community members.
- Highlight the concept that high density activity nodes can be surrounded by lower density development.
- Redevelopment within activity centers can revitalize communities. Show success stories.
- Planning for transit requires coordination from many parties is a complicated process, and often the best solution is a compromise.

Other Notes from Group Discussion:

- AASHTO is publishing new bicycle facilities guidelines.
- Definitions of multimodal center, transit node, and transit-oriented development need to be clearly identified in the Guidelines.
- The Guidelines will be helpful in the MPO long range planning process, especially to identify and incentivize multimodal centers and corridors.

Perspectives on Planning for the Tide Light Rail:

Much of the existing development in Norfolk preceded plans for the light rail, making it a challenge to fit the light rail alignment in constrained rights-of-way. The old Norfolk Southern line was utilized for the alignment outside of downtown Norfolk. Access to this right-of-way was limited. Development decisions in the 1960s and 1970s dictated much of the urban form in downtown. During those times, an attempt at a pedestrian mall on Granby Street failed. Hampton Roads Transit originally proposed Granby Street for the alignment of the light rail system in downtown. Heavy traffic volumes on Granby Street complicated the alignment, and City traffic engineers and the public works department proposed the light rail alignment be located on an alternative street. The agencies collectively decided on Plume Street as the final alignment for portions of the system. Plume Street has slower traffic and provides a safer pedestrian environment.

Ridership for this 7.4 mile starter line has exceeded projections. Major employers may receive free passes for all employees for a fee to HRT, which has contributed to high ridership, especially at park-and-ride stations where parking is free. This line is seen as a success, and some Norfolk and Virginia Beach residents have expressed desire for extension of the system.

Observations from Tide Light Rail Tour (note – these were observations noted by tour participants – not a detailed assessment):

EVMC/Fort Norfolk

- Not a lot of development – there is the medical complex, but mainly residential otherwise
 - Includes an active adult complex
- The potential for development is there, it just has not taken place yet
- There are connections to bus transit
- End of line – would like to see extensions – what happens if the train keeps going?

York Street/Freemason

- There is new development around the station
 - Apartment buildings
 - Brambleton
 - Not much commercial yet
 - New YMCA stayed because of the light rail location
- A new parking garage is being built
- Participants observed pedestrian activity
- The streetscape is inviting and context sensitive
- The Hay housing development

Monticello

- Participants saw a lot of pedestrian activity. Good pedestrian accessibility exists.
- There were no direct bus connections.
- There were no bike lanes or bike parking, but the City of Norfolk has initiated a program for bike planning and to find suitable locations for bike facilities.
 - HRTPO is conducting a regional inventory of bike facilities, and they have created a bike task force and commission for the City Council.
- The light rail transit station could facilitate multimodal connections.
- There were many mixed use buildings with commercial on the ground floor and residential above

Civic Plaza

- Most of the nearby development is courthouses and government buildings. There were no residential uses observed nearby.
- Participants observed a lot of pedestrian activity.
- A nearby surface parking lot looked like a prime location for a redevelopment opportunity, especially for transit-oriented development.

- A new court building is under construction.
- Many city employees ride the light rail from park-and-ride to this stop because of the employer transit pass.

Harbor Park

- This station contains a large park-and-ride facility.
- This is a potential site for many future intermodal connections including Amtrak and fast ferry service.
- There is an elementary school nearby.
- The baseball stadium presents challenges on game days, especially on overcrowding the light rail cars.
- There is a lot of surface parking within the station area for the stadium. The City has plans to develop these lots, and negotiations are underway.
- The Tide system has helped to bring people to baseball games.
- A multi-use path exists for bike connectivity across bridges.

Norfolk State University

- The alignment was elevated in this portion.
- The station is next to a busy highway.
- A vacant lot nearby is owned by the City and has been of interest to Norfolk State University.
- There are good connections to the bus system at this station and to the City of Chesapeake.

Ballentine

- This station has a commuter parking lot and good vehicular accessibility, but very little pedestrian activity observed.
- The land use consists of single family neighborhoods.

Ingleside Dr

- This station area is primarily a single family neighborhood. One participant called it a 'cul-de-sac' station.
- It has limited accessibility for all modes – there is only one way in and one way out.
- Participants observed very little pedestrian activity.
- The low traffic, low volume streets look friendly for bicyclists, however no specific bicycle facilities exist.
- The sidewalk network seemed complete and connected indicating good walkability. However, there were not a lot of destinations to walk to.
- A phased density approach has potential.
- The surrounding community wants to remain unchanged.
- Parking permits are required at this station.

Military Hwy

- The station area contained an office complex and a bus turnaround.

Newtown Road

- This station area contained some mixed use development. the station is at the Norfolk/Virginia Beach boundary

- The park-and-ride facility looked full.
- It is a transfer station to bus service.
- Participants observed very little pedestrian activity.

Other points of discussion:

- The City of Norfolk is implementing a "Get Healthy" initiative that includes an assessment of pedestrian and bike infrastructure.
- The current fiscal year is the first where the City budget includes dedicated funding for bikes.
- Public outreach efforts in Norfolk consistently indicate that citizens want more bike infrastructure and they want to extend the Tide light rail system.
- The investments of the City are consistent with the Regional Transit Vision Plan.